

TESTIMONY OF JAMES POULSON
BEFORE THE BELT AIR TECHNICAL STUDY PANEL & MINE SAFETY
AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
REGARDING
BELT AIR RULING
MAY 17, 2007
SALT LAKE CITY UTAH

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the technical study panel, MSHA and fellow colleagues for the opportunity to present comments regarding belt air, concerning safety of mines utilizing belt air at the face. My name is James Poulson. For the last 30 years I have worked at Energy West, Valley Camp Coal, and Skyline Mine in various management positions. I am presently the Manager of Safety for the Andalex, West Ridge, and Genwal Resources, Inc. subsidiaries of UtahAmerican Energy, Inc. of Murray Energy Corp. I belong to the International Society of Mine Safety Professionals and I am a registered Certified Mine Safety Professional. UtahAmerican currently operates five underground coal mines employing over 400 employees. Three UtahAmerican mines are currently in production, including Aberdeen and West Ridge which are presently utilizing belt air at the working face. Crandall and South Crandall Mines successfully used belt air to the working face in the past but are not doing so at this time.

We consider the safety of our employees to be a value which we will not compromise. We believe it is our moral and ethical responsibility to protect the health and safety of all our employees, which is what brings us here today. I cannot emphasize enough that the elimination of the use of belt air would be very harmful to the safety of our underground miners.

I can personally testify from a safety perspective that ground control, dust control, dilution of dangerous gases and overall miner's safety is improved when belt air can be utilized at the working face.

I'd like to address my remarks to ventilation at UtahAmerican's mines. Previous testimony and numerous studies have demonstrated that use of belt air definitely increases the efficiency of the mine-wide ventilation system. This additional air increases dilution of methane and respirable dust, reducing worker exposures to these hazards. Some questions have been raised about increased dust levels with the increased ventilating pressure or currents. MSHA and NIOSH data, testing, and operator sampling substantiates that the use of increased belt line ventilation provides an enormous reduction in respirable dust and increased gas dilution. It is a well known fact that concentrations of respirable dust are inversely proportional to the air quantity used to dilute them. If you double your air quantity, your dust concentration is cut in half.

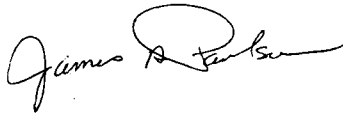
In today's western U.S. mines 1,500 to 3,000 feet of cover is commonplace. To control the adverse roof, pillar outbursts and bouncing conditions, and enhance worker safety, 2-entry systems were developed. At these depths, studies and experience have proven that it is just not good practice to develop more entries than absolutely needed. The less entries you have, the more likely you are to be able to control the ground and bouncing. Operators desiring to utilize 2-entry systems had to file a petition pursuant to section 101 (c) of the Federal Mine Safety & Health Act. If granted, these petitions obligated the operator to a multitude of additional requirements. Unquestionably the most rigorous requirement contained in petitions is the use of AMS (atmospheric monitoring systems). Other common petition requirements for 2-entry development were automatic fire suppression systems on diesel equipment, tracking and monitoring of equipment entering and leaving the sections, diesel discriminating CO sensors no greater than 1000 feet apart in the intake and beltline and extending 4000 feet outby the section, two separate and independent means of communication (one in the intake and one in the beltline) and phones no greater than 1000 feet apart, additional SCSR's stored at the headgate and tailgate (prior to the additional requirements of the MINER Act of 2006), fire fighting outlets extending into the intake escapeway every 300 feet, trained mine monitor system operators on duty on the surface 24/7, and sometimes even required the use of a PED system when entering the section. Some mines had various other requirements, all of which improved worker safety.

Previous testimony has described the functions of AMS systems, so I won't go into detail about their capabilities. In my 30+ years of mining, I believe the AMS system is one of the most important devices introduced into the mining industry to improve overall worker safety.

Congress, MSHA, NIOSH, mine operators, individual miners and many others had a hand in propagating the current belt air rules, and as far as I know, the current belt air rules have not been shown to be a contributing factor in any of the disasters which tragically occurred in this country during 2006 – not even in the Aracoma disaster which involved a beltline fire. We would encourage this committee to acknowledge the previous experience and endorse the current rule.

Thank you,

James A. Poulson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James A. Poulson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Safety Manager

UtahAmerican Energy, Inc.